

**COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT
HUMAN SERVICES FUNDING COMMITTEE
Fiscal Year 2005**

The Amherst Community Services Department provides a variety of services to Amherst families and the Amherst community. During the last fiscal year, the Community Service Department's responsibilities increased significantly: during August, the Coordinator was appointed staff liaison to the Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee, and when the Town was notified it had been designated a mini-entitlement community by the state Department of Housing and Community Development, the Coordinator also became responsible for submitting the Town's application to the state for Community Development Block Grant funds.

The Coordinator continues to 1. provide the community with childcare/early education information, especially regarding the availability of tuition assistance for low-income families, 2. administer Town appropriations to human service agencies, 3. provide emergency assistance to low-income individuals and families, using interest from the Alfred Field Charitable Trust Fund, 4. edit the Annual Town Report, 5. assess community needs with respect to childcare and human services, 6. develop new programs that respond to community priorities, 7. work collaboratively with numerous committees and groups that provide important services to the Amherst community and 8. provide staff assistance to the Cable Advisory Committee, the Council on Youth and the Human Services Funding Committee.

HOUSING

The Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee's major responsibility is to increase the availability of affordable housing for low- and moderate- income Amherst individuals and families. In 1989 the Town acquired a parcel of land, referred to as "Olympia Drive," mainly for open space preservation. Approximately six acres of this parcel, however, were reserved for the development of affordable housing. A joint development plan with the University of Massachusetts had been under discussion. When the University made it known that they did wish to proceed at this time, the HP began planning in earnest during the fall of FY 05. The Housing Partnership requested \$50,000 of Community Preservation Act funding to begin pre-development activity. The Community Services Coordinator wrote a grant to the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and received \$35,000 to contribute to pre-development costs for this project. During the spring of FY 05, the Community Service Department requested proposals from both site-design firms and financial feasibility analysts to begin the pre-development phase of this project. In June, a subcommittee of the Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee chose Berkshire Design to complete the site feasibility study that would determine the most effective design for this site. The financial feasibility analyst will be chosen early in FY 06.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

During the fall of FY 05, the Town was notified by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) that it had become a mini-entitlement community eligible for up to \$600,000 in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. Most Massachusetts communities must compete for CDBG funds; mini-entitlement communities are guaranteed a minimum of \$200,000 if their application meets minimum standards established by DHCD. The most important standard is that 51% of the beneficiaries of each activity must have incomes below 80% of the area median income as defined by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Amherst held three public hearings to ensure community participation in the program, and Town staff made suggestions based on discussions with boards and committees. The funding request included the following activities:

First Time Homebuyer Counseling	\$ 86,000
Pomeroy Lane Drainage Project	\$187,000
Design to improve Kitchens at Chestnut Ct.	\$ 35,000
Update of the Town's disability access plan	\$ 35,000
Social Services	\$120,000
Administration	\$109,991

CHILDCARE

During FY 05 Hampshire County faced a childcare crisis: Hampshire Community Action Commission (HCAC) was no longer able to continue operation of its daycare programs. After much negotiation on the part of HCAC staff, local elected officials, and state agency representatives, both the childcare and Head Start programs were transferred to new agencies on a temporary basis. Franklin County Action Commission began operating the Amherst Community Childcare Center on Strong Street in Amherst, and Community Development Institute began operating the Head Start program at the North Amherst School. Both the state and the federal government will request proposals for permanent providers in the coming year.

SCHOOL AGE CHILDCARE

The 2004 Annual Town Meeting had allocated \$16,295.00 to provide tuition assistance for low- and moderate-income families with children attending school-based after-school childcare programs. During FY 05, twelve families received support for sixteen children attending these programs. These funds helped parents pay for childcare services while they continued to work or attend educational institutions.

HUMAN SERVICES:

The Human Services Funding Committee reviews proposals for funding from human service agencies and makes funding recommendations to the Select Board, Finance Committee and Town Meeting.

The Human Services Funding Committee continues to face difficult decisions, as human service agencies continue to increase their requests for funds. The Committee's priorities for funding continue to follow the guidelines established by the Select Board, namely: 1. emergency services: survival or critical, 2. preventive services and 3. information and referral. The 2005 Annual Town Meeting approved the following allocations, totaling \$125,321, for FY 06, in accordance with recommendations presented by the Human Services Funding Committee. As a result of the current fiscal crisis, the Committee recommended a small decrease in funding for each agency. The following were the Committee's recommendations:

Amherst Survival Center	\$33,450.00
Family Outreach of Amherst	\$22,000.00
Not Bread Alone	\$ 5,930.00
Children's Aid and Family Services	\$ 7,840.00
Commuter Resources/Homesharing	\$ 1,146.00
Everywoman's Center	\$ 2,965.00

Safe Passage	\$ 6,875.00
Men's Resource Center	\$ 4,975.00
Big Brother/Big Sister of Hampshire County	\$24,000.00
Amherst Family Center	\$ 1,990.00
Service Net/Interfaith Cot Program	\$ 4,975.00
Center for New Americans	\$ 4,200.00
Casa Latina Outreach	\$ 4,975.00

The Community Services Coordinator continued to participate in monthly meetings of the Amherst Human Service Network, a group of human service personnel concerned with the social service problems facing the Amherst community: the Early Childhood Community Partnership; the Hampshire Council of Social Agencies and the Strategic Planning Initiative for Families and Youth.

YOUTH SERVICES

The Department again applied to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety for funding to support the Big Brother/Big Sister Program. During FY 05, the Community Services Department was notified that it would receive \$42,700.00 to increase services for Amherst youth. During the spring, the Department again applied to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety for funds to support the Big Brother/Big Sister Program.

The Council on Youth held monthly meetings during the year but had a difficult time deciding how to approach its difficult charge.

OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES

The (Cable Advisory Commission) CAC essentially completed a draft Request For Proposal (RFP) and, as the new fiscal year approached, was ready to begin negotiations with Comcast for their renewal license with the Town.

Requests for charitable funds continue to increase each year. The increased cost of rent, utilities, etc. makes it more difficult to serve all those in need.

The FY 04 Town Report was completed and copies distributed to the Select Board, the Finance Committee, the Town Manager, department heads, the School Department and the Jones Library. The editors of the Town Report thank members of the Information Technology Department for their help in printing the FY 04 Annual Town Report.

Roy Rosenblatt
Community Services Coordinator